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THE STATUS OF WILDMAN RESEARCH IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT: Chinese historical documents contain many references to Wildman, a supposed large unknown primate reported today in numerous provinces. Scientific interest in Wildman in modern China began in the late 1950's, and intensified in the 1970's with fieldwork in northwest Hubei and southern Shanxi provinces sponsored by the Chinese Academy of Sciences. No physical evidence has been uncovered, with the exception of the hands and feet of a supposed Wildman. Morphological analysis indicates that they had belonged to a very large monkey species, possibly a macaque, still unknown to science. These undescribed monkeys may account for sightings of the "smaller" Wildman. A number of reported morphological and ecological characteristics are reviewed, and Wildman's possible affinities to the fossil ape *Gigantopithecus* are discussed. The discovery of an actual specimen of Wildman could shed light on the classificatory status of *Gigantopithecus*, and would certainly enhance knowledge of the origins of human evolution, particularly bipedalism.

EARLIEST HISTORICAL RECORDS AND FOLKLORE

Chinese historical documents, and many city and town annals, contain abundant records of Wildman, which are given various names, such as "manbear," "hairy man," "shangui" (mountain monster), "xingxing" (orang-utan), and "feifei."

In the period of Warring States (475–221 B.C.), Qu Yuan, a great poet, wrote a poem about "shangui" (mountain monster). Some scholars believe that the theme of the poem corresponds to the legend of Wildman.

During the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 A.D.), the great pharmacologist Li Shizhen mentioned several kinds of Wildman in the 51st volume of his monumental work *Compendium of Materia Medica*. One of them was called "feifei," an account of which is quoted as follows:

> "Feifei," which are called "manbear," are also found in the mountainous areas in west Shu [part of Sichuan Province today] and Chu division, where people skin them and eat their palms. The You mountain of Sha county, Fujian province, sees the same ones, standing about one zhang [equal to 3.1 meters] in height and smiling to the people they come across, and are called "shandaren" [men as big as mountains], "wildmen" or "shanxiao."

Even today, in the area of Fang County, Hubei Province, there are still legends about "maoren" (hairy men) or "wildmen." A local chronicle, about 200 years old, says that "the Fang mountain lying 40 li [2 li equals one kilometer] south to the county town is precipitous and full of holes, where live many maoren, about one zhang high and hair-coated. They often come down to eat human beings and chickens and dogs, and seize those who fight

them." A lantern on which there is an ornament of a "maoren" figure was unearthed in this area during an archeological excavation. It has been dated at 2,000 years.

There are fairly widespread folk tales about Wildman among the peoples of China. One of the most well-known says that there was a kind of long-haired Wildman in the depths of a montane forest. When it saw people, it would smile, grab their two arms tightly, and then faint with laughter. Once recovered, it would kill and eat them. Thereafter, when people entered the mountains, they took a pair of hollow bamboo poles with them. If by chance they met a Wildman, they would put their arms into the poles, and when the Wildman fainted with laughter, they would break away from it by slipping the poles off their arms—and would then either run away or kill it. Stories like this are heard in many parts of China.

Eyewitness Accounts in Modern Times

In modern times, incidents of people encountering Wildman have been reported from time to time in Sichuan, Yunnan, Hubei, Shanxi, Zhejiang, Fujian, and Anhuei provinces, and the autonomous regions of Tibet and Xinjiang. Many witnesses say that they have seen "strange animals," resembling both man and ape, huge-bodied, hairy, and walking upright. (There are also a number of reported instances in which Wildman specimens were killed or captured alive.) Some witnesses, however, say that the Wildman they saw was short and slight in build.

Among these numerous reports, there are two worthy of note because the witnesses were scientific workers and had a good knowledge of natural science. One is Wang Tselin, a biologist, who saw a Wildman killed in the Gansu area in 1940; it was a female with very big breasts, was covered with greyish-brown hair, was about 2 meters in height, and the configuration of its face looked very much like the famous Peking Man. The other is Fan Jingquan, a geologist. With the help of local guides, he watched, at a safe distance, two local Wildman in the mountain forest near Baoji County, Shanxi Province, in the spring of 1950. They were mother and son, the smaller one being 1.6 meters in height. Both looked human. Some Soviet scholars later learned of this, and had it reported briefly in a newspaper.

There have been an increasing number of eyewitness reports of Wildman in recent years, and Chinese scientists are being urged to make on-the-spot investigations.

Scientific Investigations in New China

Chinese scientific investigations of Wildman on a regular basis started with the founding of new China, organized by state-owned scientific institutions, funded by the government, and staffed by the scientific departments

concerned. These scientific activities have been as follows, in chronological order:

(1) Investigation of the "Abominable Snowman" (Yeti) in the 1950's

By the end of the 1950's, the "Snowman craze" had spread throughout the world, and many private investigation teams from various countries went to the southern foot of the Himalayas to search for it. In China, the investigation was assigned to a Himalayan mountaineering expedition engaged in the mountaineering organized by the All-China Federation of Sports. Participants in this investigation were scientific workers of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and biology professors at Peking University. They conducted this investigation in Tibet, from May to July of 1959, and it was reported that they had found a piece of head hair 16 cm long, and had had it analyzed microscopically. They found that it was different in structure from that of the orang-utan, brown bear, or yak, but could not prove, of course, that it was the head-hair of a Snowman.

Numerous people, including participants in the current investigation, do not believe in the existence of the Snowman. They think that they are probably bears. But Professor Wu Dingliang, an anthropologist and director of the Division of Anthropological Teaching and Research at Shanghai Fudan University, and the present author, both conclude that the Snowman is probably a large, unknown species of primate.

To the knowledge of the author, there are Snowman legends not only in Tibet and Xingjiang, but also in the northwestern areas of Yunnan Province, such as Deoin and Zhong Dian, which are inhabited by people of Tibetan ancestry.

(2) Investigation of Wildman in the Forests of Xishuang Banna, Yunnan Province, in the 1960's

In 1961, it was reported that road builders had encountered and killed a female Wildman in the primeval thick forest of the Xishuang Banna area. It was said that the Wildman was 1.2 to 1.3 meters in height, that it was covered with hair, that it walked upright, and that its hands, ears, breasts, and external genitalia were similar to those of a female human. The concerned departments of the Chinese Academy of Sciences conducted an on-the-spot investigation. They failed to obtain any direct evidence, thereby refuting the existence of Wildman in Xishuang Banna. Some participants in the investigation even asserted that the Wildman was nothing but a gibbon living in the thick primeval forests. The present author recently visited a newsman who took part in that investigation. He stated that the animal which had been killed was not a gibbon, but an unknown animal of human shape. It is worth noting that, over the past 2 years or so, some people in

FIG. 1.—Lower parts of the forested Shennongjia Mountain Range, where Wildman has been investigated by Chinese Academy of Sciences expeditions.

the western border areas of Yunnan Province say that the above-mentioned kind of Wildman still move about, and that another one has since been killed. (The author published an article entitled "The Wildman I Saw" in the 10th issue of *New Observer,* 1980, on the Wildman in the forest of Xishuang Banna.)

(3) Investigation of Wildman in Northwestern Hubei and Southern Shanxi Provinces in the 1970's

There have been legends about giant-sized "hairy men" existing in the forests of Fang County and the Shennongjia area of Hubei Province since the earliest historical times. Resembling both man and ape, walking upright, and leaving huge footprints, these creatures are said to be covered with red hair, and their head hair is long. In recent years, witnesses have reportedly encountered Wildman on a number of occasions, and this has aroused interest in Chinese scientific circles.

A large-scale scientific investigation sponsored by the Chinese Academy of Sciences was carried out in these areas in 1977. More than 100 people participated in it for nearly a year, and the author took part as head of both the "deep-thrust" team and the scientific research group. As head of the "deep-thrust" team, I directed the investigation of the whole area around

FIG. 2.—The author, in his Beijing office, analyzing Wildman evidence collected in Hubei Province.

the highest peaks of the greater and lesser Shennongjia Mountain Range, which is covered with thick, ancient forests (Fig. 1), and as head of the research group, I was responsible for the summary work based on all the scientific evidence obtained during the investigation (Fig. 2).

Although the investigation was unusual in its scale, number of participants, and duration, no direct proof was found of the existence of the Wildman, and only footprints, pieces of head hair, and feces presumed to be those of Wildman were recovered. (Some of the author's articles on this investigation appeared in a volume entitled *Wolf Children, Snowmen, and Fire Fossils.* More recently, the author wrote a comprehensive summary of the 1977 Shennongjia area investigation entitled "Are We Tracking Down a Non-existent Animal?" This was part of a book, *Mystery Yet to Be Opened,* which was edited by the author.)

After a short break, the investigation of Wildman in the Shennongjia forest areas was resumed. Between 1979 and 1980, an investigation under the sponsorship of local departments included biology professors at Shanghai Teacher's University, and it extended the area of investigation to include neighboring parts of Sichuan province. A skeleton of a "monkey child" was found, which some people believed represented a species of monkey with a

"human" body. Others adhered to the idea that it was the progeny of a Wildman and a human woman captured by the former. But these are tenuous arguments, and in my view the skeleton is that of a deformed human. This view is strengthened by the higher than normal occurrence of human genetic deformities in the area of investigation.

In Shanxi Province, there were reports of villagers encountering a Wildman in the area to the east of the Taibai mountains of Qinling in 1977. It was said to be 2 meters in height, and it walked upright. Subsequently, a biological resources study team from Shanxi Province made an on-the-spot investigation, and suggested that it could be a large unknown primate.

(4) Investigation of "Manbears" of Jiolong Mountain of Sui Chang, Zhejiang Province, in the Early 1980's

"Manbears" in the Jiolong Mountain Natural Reserve Area were recorded long ago in local chronicles. Li Shizen wrote in his *Compendium of Materia Medica* that there were "manbears" in Chu Zhou, which covers the Sui Chang area today, to the southeast of Li Shui County.

Scientific investigation of "manbears" on the Jiolong mountain is mainly under the direction of the Science Committee of Li Shui Prefecture, and participants are personnel in specific fields at scientific research institutions and universities. Preserved hands and feet (two of each) were recently obtained from a middle-school teacher of biology. He obtained them in 1957, when local peasants reportedly killed a "manbear." These remains represent the first instance of physical evidence obtained during investigations of Wildman in China (Fig. 3).

In December 1980, I went to Sui Chang to study these hand and foot specimens. I concluded, beyond any doubt, that they belong to a higher primate, and have morphological traits of both ape and monkey. The eyewitnesses thought that they had belonged to a Wildman, or of a manlike "strange animal," but after examining the specimens, I determined that they were not the hands and feet of a Wildman. They might possibly belong to an enormous monkey (perhaps a species of macaque not previously recorded in this area). These hands and feet could not have come from the legendary "manbear," which is said to be about 2 meters in height, and leaves large footprints. However, there is no denying the possibility that they came from an unknown primate in the Jiolong Mountain area.

There are similar legends about Wildman in places other than the Jiolong Mountain area, such as the Wuyi Mountain in Fujian Province, the Huang Mountain in Anhui Province, and the nearby counties of Sui Chang, Zhejiang Province.

In summary, since the end of the 1950's, China has organized a series of on-the-spot investigations of Wildman in Tibet, and the provinces of Yunnan, Hubei, Shanxi, and Zhejiang. Among the participants in these investigations have been a number of professional scientists, such as anthropologists, geologists, zoologists, and botanists, as well as personnel in specific fields of zoological parks and natural history museums. Taking part in the investigation in the Shennongjia forest area are experienced huntsmen and skilled scouts.

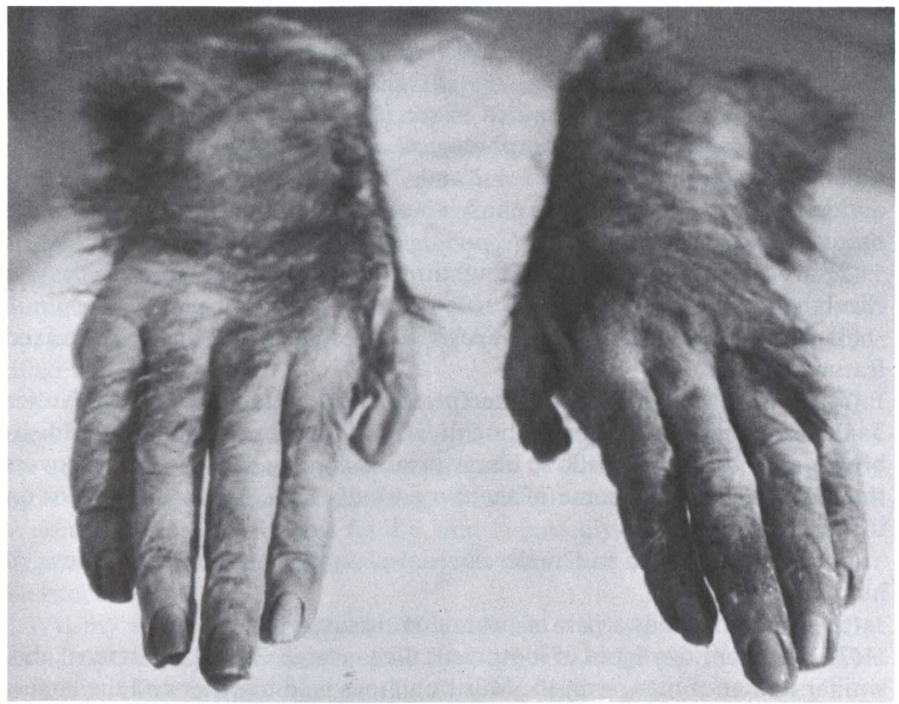

FIG. 3.—The preserved hands from the Jiolong Mountain "manbear" killed in 1957. The author's analysis indicates that they had belonged to a large unknown monkey species.

Up to the present time, apart from the above-mentioned hand and foot samples obtained in the Jiolong Mountain areas of Zhejian Province, no direct physical evidence has been found to support the existence of Wildman. That is to say, all we know about Wildman is based on indirect evidence, such as folklore, eyewitness accounts, footprints, hair samples, and feces samples. Legends about Wildman in these areas have a long history, however, and there are numerous eyewitnesses. More significantly, the ecological and morphological aspects of Wildman are consistently reported. Thus, it can be inferred that these unknown animals are not mere creatures of fiction. What Chinese scientific workers seek on thickly forested mountains may actually be unknown animals, yet to be scientifically described.

Morphological and Ecological Characteristics

Based on the evidence obtained in recent years, the legendary Wildman of China has the following morphological characteristics:

(1) Its height varies between 1.2 and 2.5 meters. It can perhaps be subdivided into two types, a larger one of about 2 meters in height, and a smaller one, about 1 meter in height.

(2) It can walk upright, but four limbs are used when running fast or climbing slopes.

(3) It resembles both man and ape, with faces, in particular, having mixed features of both.

(4) Its head-hair consists of interspersed short and long hairs, the former 3–4 cm in length, the latter trailing down the shoulders. The hair, reddish-brown, grey, brownish-yellow, black, or occasionally white in color, covers the whole body. Only some of them reportedly have hair of light color on the chest.

(5) Its hands, ears, and male external genitalia are similar to those of humans.

(6) The female has a pair of prominent breasts.

(7) There are two types of footprints. One is large, 30–40 cm, remarkably similar to that of man, with the four small toes held together and the largest one pointing slightly outwards. The other type is smaller, about 20 cm, and more similar to the footprint of an ape or monkey, with the largest toe evidently pointing outwards.

(8) It has no syllabic language, but yells monotonously.

Their ecological characteristics are as follows:

(1) They are usually observed as isolates. Only on rare occasions are they seen in pairs (one male and one female, or one female and an infant).

(2) They can move about in winter, and do not seem to hibernate.

(3) They consume berries, nuts, tender stems, saplings, and roots, but eat insects on occasion. When maize ripens in the autumn, they come out of the forests quite often to take it, and are then likely to encounter people.

(4) They have not been observed using tools, for either food gathering or defense.

(5) They can move about at night, but their eyes do not reflect light, a characteristic that nocturnal animals usually have.

(6) They live mainly in thick primeval forests which are sparsely populated by humans. They are good at avoiding detection by people in groups, but if they encounter a human, they make no aggressive moves.

Conclusions

Investigative activity and research work on Wildman continue at various levels. It should be emphasized that there are two completely different views on Wildman in Chinese scientific circles. The majority of scientific workers reject the existence of animals in human shape (i.e., Wildman), because of factors related to animal ecology and their modern geographical distributions. They argue that the legendary Wildman merely represents some known animal, such as bear, monkey, or gibbon ape, or that reports of Wildman might be due to hallucinations, or even deliberate fabrications. A smaller number of scholars are of the opinion that the existence of Wildman should not be rejected, and that Wildman might be a living species yet to be identified by science.

Even among the latter, there are different views on the classification of the unknown creatures vis-à-vis systematic zoology. Some think that they are surviving descendants of *Ramapithecus* or *Australopithecus* (especially *A. robustus*), both remote relatives of modern man. Others assume that Wildman belongs to the ape family, and is possibly a living descendant of *Gigantopithecus* or the orang-utan, which thrived in southern China in the Pleistocene.

It is my view that these human-like animals are *not* of human type, or at least that the possibility is very small that they are. Judging from the available evidence, there is no indication that they live in groups, nor that they have simple syllabic language, nor that they make or use tools; and these are the prerogative of the prehumans. It should also be pointed out that no fossil remains which can definitely be associated with *Australopithecus* (especially *A. robustus*) have been found in China.

If the legendary Wildman or the witnessed Wildman exists, I am of the opinion that it is quite possibly the descendant of *Gigantopithecus.* Up to now, only fossil lower jawbones and teeth of *Gigantopithecus* have been unearthed, and it is therefore difficult to infer its height and mode of locomotion. Nevertheless, quite a few scholars estimate their height to be about 2 meters, and some of them even infer that they could walk erect. Since many eyewitnesses report that the Chinese Wildman is about 2 meters in height and walks upright, the fossil evidence could conceivably associate Wildman with *Gigantopithecus.*

It is interesting to note that, in most of the areas where legendary Wildman is reported in modern times, there are still found primeval forests which contain quite a few surviving species of trees of the Tertiary period, such as *Cercidiphyllum japonicum, Liriodendron chinensis,* and *Emmenopterys henryi.* In a relatively static environment, which has been less affected by

glaciers of the Quaternary period, it is possible that not only some of the flora but also some of the fauna of previous times could have survived.

Moreover, *Gigantopithecus* was the dominant member of the *Ailuropoda-Stegodon* fauna thriving in the mainland of China in the middle and later period of the Pleistocene. Later, most of the members of this fauna disappeared because of geological changes. However, there are still quite a few survivors; among them, for instance, the Malaysian tapir and orang-utan, as well as the giant panda, which changed its habits and characteristics and remained in the middle and western part of China. Therefore, it is not impossible that *Gigantopithecus,* as the dominant member of this fauna, could also have changed its original habits and characteristics and survived to the present. It may have evolved into the large Wildman now reported in China, the Snowman (Yeti) in areas in the southern part of the Himalayas, and might even have crossed the Isthmus of Bering to become the Sasquatch (Bigfoot) of North America.

However, *Gigantopithecus* is a topic of contention in the field of paleoanthropology. Some scholars maintain that it belongs to the ape lineage, while others believe that it should be included in the human lineage. Consequently, there are different opinions as to its morphological features, and ecological and behavioral characteristics. If we could capture a Wildman and prove that it is the descendant of *Gigantopithecus,* this would, in turn, help classify the fossil *Gigantopithecus*!

What is most astonishing of all, however, is that Wildman is reported to walk upright, and that its footprints are similar to human footprints (it is the same with Sasquatch and the Snowman). How did it evolve a way of walking bipedally? If we could capture a Wildman and understand the mechanics of its bipedalism, this would undoubtedly be of great help in clarifying how the mechanics of human bipedalism evolved. Therefore, if a specimen were obtained, it would not only be an important scientific discovery, but it would also be of great significance to the research on the origin and evolution of all mankind. This is one of the basic premises of Wildman research in China.

My analysis of the hand and foot specimens of the "manbear" of Jiolong Mountain, Zhejiang Province, has produced a new hypothesis. Through many-sided comparative studies of these samples, it is reasonable to postulate that they might not be the hands of an ape at all, but of an enormous species of monkey still unknown to science. Thus, the legendary small-sized Wildman known as "xingxing" in parts of China might have its origin in observations of large monkeys. This hypothesis, of course, requires further study.

Finally, it should be emphasized that many of the participants in Wildman research in China are professional scientific workers. At the same time,

however, it has to be admitted that most of them are not well trained in faunal ecology, primatology, vertebrate paleontology, paleoanthropology, physical anthropology and other disciplines concerned with this topic. Consequently, when they collect and describe evidence, or visit witnesses to obtain first-hand reports, they are not always in a totally objective and scientific frame of mind. This, in turn, can affect the accuracy and reliability of the evidence which they collect. Caution therefore must be exercised when using their materials. However, we are confident that, with the development of further research and experience, these drawbacks gradually will be overcome.